



Region 2
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804

January 25, 2019

Dear Interested Citizen:

Thank you for your thoughtful reviews and comments on a proposal by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to acquire fee title to an approximately 154-acre land parcel, as an addition to FWP's adjoining 9,635-acre Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area (GMWMA). The private parcel is currently owned by YT Timber, LLC and is located 7 miles west of Anaconda in Deer Lodge County. The parcel is in an area identified in the Natural Resource Damage Programs' (NRDP) 2012 Restoration Plan as a priority landscape for conservation actions. The GMWMA addition would protect a migration corridor for bighorn sheep and key habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout as well as preclude subdivision or development. It would be managed for fish and wildlife habitat as well as to improve public recreational access and opportunities on GMWMA. The project would be funded by NRDP, the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Fund, and FWP's Habitat Montana Fund.

Enclosed is a decision document in which FWP explains its rationale for recommending that the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve this acquisition and addition to GMWMA as proposed. Upon completion of the public involvement process, FWP accepts the draft environmental assessment (EA) as final. The decision document also includes all public comments received during the public comment period on the proposed public hunting access assignment.

FWP will request approval for this proposal from the Fish & Wildlife Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting on February 13, 2019 in Helena. FWP also will request approval from the State Board of Land Commissioners. These meetings are open to the public, as are other regularly scheduled Commission and Land Board meetings

Please feel free to contact me at 406-542-5500 with any questions you may have. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Randy Arnold
Regional Supervisor

RA:sr

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DECISION NOTICE

Proposed YT Timber Addition to Garry Mountain Wildlife Management Area

*Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; Region 2
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula MT 59804
Phone 406-542-5500
January 25, 2019*

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

This environmental assessment (EA) evaluates Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' (FWP) proposal to acquire fee title to approximately 154.05 acres (hereafter, 154 acres) of private land, as an addition to FWP's adjoining 9,635-acre Garry Mountain Wildlife Management Area (GMWMA). The private parcel is currently owned by YT Timber, LLC (hereafter, YT Timber) and is located 7 miles west of Anaconda in Deer Lodge County (Figure 1). The acquisition and subsequent inclusion of this property into GMWMA would protect a migration corridor for bighorn sheep and key habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout, as well as preclude potential subdivision or development of this parcel and the negative impacts to fish and wildlife that could result. The parcel is in an area identified in the Natural Resource Damage Programs' (NRDP) Restoration Plan (2012) as a priority landscape for conservation actions.

All acreage acquired by FWP under this proposal would become part of the larger GMWMA and would be managed for fish and wildlife habitat as well as public recreational access and opportunities. GMWMA is comprised of two separate units or property, currently totaling 9,635 acres. The Garry Mountain (northern) unit totals approximately 7,370 acres and would increase to approximately 7,524 after the proposed acquisition. The Clear Creek (southern) unit would remain unchanged at approximately 2,265 acres. Both GMWMA units provide critical winter range for elk, deer, and bighorn sheep. Warm Springs and Barker creeks run through the proposed addition and provide habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout, both Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

GMWMA offers opportunities for outdoor recreation such as hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, horseback riding, and bird watching. The WMA is within 30 minutes (or less) of Deer Lodge, Butte, and Anaconda, and 1½ hours from Missoula and Helena.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

- Add critical fish and wildlife habitat to the existing GMWMA
- Enhance recreational opportunities and provide additional access to GMWMA for the public
- Help buffer GMWMA from subdivisions or development along its northern border
- Protect a bighorn sheep migration route between Blue-Eyed Nellie WMA and GMWMA.

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A--Proposed Action: FWP would purchase 154 acres of land from YT Timber for addition to GMWMA.

Under the Proposed Action FWP would purchase a 154-acre parcel from YT Timber for inclusion in GMWMA. The \$416,296 funding for the purchase of the land would come from three grants: \$100,000 from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust (MFWCT), \$50,000 from Habitat Montana, and \$266,296 from the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NRPD).

If the acquisition is approved, the new parcel would be managed as part of GMWMA, and the primary management purposes of GMWMA would continue to be wildlife habitat enhancement and public recreation, including hunting. The purchase of the property would protect a migration corridor for bighorn sheep and critical wildlife habitat, increase public access and recreational opportunities, and prevent possible future subdivision and development of the property.

FWP manages GMWMA under a management plan originated with the purchase of the WMA in 2001. If acquired, FWP would manage the proposed addition to the GMWMA in accordance with the management plan for the whole WMA, which remains current and applicable at this time.

Alternative B--No Action: FWP would not purchase 154 acres from YT Timber for addition to GMWMA.

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not purchase the 154-acre parcel from YT Timber. The current owner has indicated that they prefer to sell to FWP, but if the agency does not purchase the property they will likely sell to a private buyer. Other parcels owned by the seller and not included in this sale are being sold to private buyers and would likely be subdivided or otherwise developed.

Alternative Considered but Eliminated from Further Analysis

The proposed purchase of this parcel was the only alternative considered. Purchasing a smaller amount of land than the full 154 acres would not achieve the desired conservation objectives.

PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA; "Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area Addition") for public review of this proposal on December 18, 2018 and accepted public comment for 30 days until January 16, 2019.

Legal notices of the proposed addition and its Draft EA availability were published in the following newspapers (dates): *Anaconda Leader* (December 19, 26), *Independent Record* (Helena; December 18, 31), *Missoulian* (December 18, 31), *Montana Standard* (December 18, 31), and *Silver State Post* (Deer Lodge; December 19, January 2). FWP issued a statewide news release regarding this proposal on December 21, 2018.

FWP mailed 28 copies of the EA, and emailed approximately 46 notifications of the EA's availability, to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups and (non-FWP) agencies. The EA was available for public review and comment on FWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "News," then "Recent Public Notices") from December 18, 2018 through January 16, 2019, along with opportunity to comment online.

A public hearing to discuss the proposal, answer questions and take public comment was held in Anaconda on January 3, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. at the AOH Hall (106 Cherry Street).

PUBLIC COMMENT

Summary of Public Comment

FWP received 16 written or emailed comments (Appendix; comments via E or M), representing:

- 12 people (6 from Anaconda; 1 each from Corvallis, Emigrant, Hamilton, and Stevensville, Montana; 1 from Washington state; and 1 unknown), and
- 4 sports persons groups (Anaconda Sportsman's Club; Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Missoula; Montana Wild Sheep Foundation, Missoula; Montana Wildlife Federation, Helena).
- All 16 commenters supported the acquisition.

Eight people attended the public hearing, and 6 (4 from Anaconda, 1 each from Missoula and Philipsburg) gave verbal testimony (Appendix; comments via PM). All 6 (including one person officially representing the Anaconda Sportsman's Club) supported the acquisition.

Combining and summarizing all 21¹ comments received, all were in support of the proposed acquisition to be added to Garrity Mountain WMA (Appendix). At least 4 of these commenters also own property adjacent to or nearby the proposed acquisition parcel.

Comments in Support of the Proposed Acquisition Included:

Thanks, Collaboration

- I especially would like to thank YT Timber for offering . . . to sell this property to the FWP first!
- We are highly supportive of collaborative conservation and are thankful to see that this project is part of an ongoing multi-partner initiative including: the Montana Chapter of the North American Wild Sheep Foundation, the Anaconda Sportsmen Club, the George Grant Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and the Montana NRDP.

Wildlife & Fisheries; Corridor, Connectivity, Habitat

- In spring I've seen elk calves in there.
- As bighorn struggle, it is critical to assist their viability.
- The primary driver for protection of this area, is the concern regarding the effects of subdivisions of these last remaining larger parcels in a prime Big Horn Sheep migration corridor.
- The parcel would provide an important buffer with neighboring lands that are developed and continue to serve as a route for big game to move between the Garrity Mountain and Blue-eyed Nellie WMAs.
- The footprint of this parcel illustrates that certain properties that provide linkage can be crucial to maintain wildlife movement.
- As nearby property owners, we view this as healthy stewardship of a significant wildlife migration corridor, as well as conservation of waterways that include Barker Creek and Warm Springs Creek.
- Bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout habitat in the portions of the Warm Springs and Barker creeks that run through the proposed addition further makes this acquisition a fantastic action.

Recreation

- Will provide continued and expanded recreational opportunity for sportsmen and sportswomen.
- Good access to the north side of GMWMA.

¹ One group submitted written comment and also testified at the public hearing and is counted only once.

- Access is easy to fish, hunt, bird watch and hike.
- I use this area every year. Appreciate the chance for myself and my family to have access to this area for years to come.

Economic, Financial

- This is a wise choice of use of NRDP monies.
- This project is exactly what Habitat Montana funds are intended for. Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust funds are warranted to complete the purchase. Good use of hunter's dollars.
- This WMA will . . . bring money into this county.

Future

- As I sit here writing to you. . . , I am brought back to a swing, a few feet from Barker Creek, hanging from a tree, a small deer nearby as I swing higher and higher till my toes touch the clear blue sky. My most fond memories of learning about wildlife from my Mom and Uncle, information that I cherish and value greatly until this day, and hope that everyone has the same opportunity that I had. This acquisition for FWP would absolutely solidify this opportunity for others to fully enjoy and learn about everything that Public land has to offer, and I fully support it.
- I spent a large part of my childhood in the woods from Storm Lake, to Mt. Haggin, and all around Barker Creek. I would very much like to see this land public and open to all who seek to enjoy it responsibly and find comfort among nature as I did as a youth; and do whenever I return home.
- It is impossible to describe the wonder in the eyes of my children when we see wildlife in that area.

DECISION

Based upon the Draft Environmental Assessment and the applicable laws, regulations, and policies, I have determined that the proposed action will not have negative effects on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary.

This decision benefited from public review of the proposal and informed comment. All comments received were in support of FWP acquisition of the YT Timber property and its management as part of the Garrity Mountain WMA, as proposed.

No concerns were raised that would bring the environmental analysis into question, and in consideration of these facts and with this Decision Notice, I adopt the Draft EA as final.

I recommend to the Fish and Wildlife Commission that it approve the proposed purchase of this 154-acre parcel from YT Timber and its addition to the Garrity Mountain WMA.



Randy Arnold
Region 2 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1/25/2019

Date

APPENDIX

Comments on the proposed YT Timber addition to Garrity Mountain WMA and its draft EA received by FWP during the comment period (Dec 18, 2018 through Jan 16, 2019). Comments received via E = email, M = mail, PM = public meeting. (If someone submitted comments more than once, the ID# for this person's successive comments are numbered as #a, #b, etc.)

Com- men- ter #	Via	Para- graph	Comment
1	E	1	I support the proposed action to acquire fee title to a 154-acre land parcel, as an addition to FWP's adjoining 9,635-acre Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA).
		2	I support the proposal to protect a migration corridor for bighorn sheep and key habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout as well as preclude subdivision and development. It would be managed for fish and wildlife habitat as well as to improve public access and recreational opportunities.
2	E	1	I support the Proposed Action for the FWP to purchase a 154-acre parcel from YT Timber for inclusion in GMWMA. I especially would like to Thank, YT Timber for offering and saying they would like to sell this property to the FWP first!!!! It ties in with the existing GMWMA and should be added to it.
		2	Thank you
3	E		I am fully behind the purchase of this property. It will be especially helpful for management of bighorn sheep.
4	E		Looks great, I support it
5a	E		As vice president of Anaconda sportsman club and more so as a lifelong resident here I have recreated on this piece of property through the years and am in full support of this addition. I would not like to see housing here backed up to our wma as this could be problematic. This is a corridor for elk deer and sheep to cross to winter range on stucky ridge and the blue eyed nellie wma (lime quarry). I think this is a wise choice of use of NRDP monies. Thanks.
5b	PM		[Public meeting commenter #2] Without this project we might have a split movement corridor--we want this project to prevent that.
6	E	1	The Montana Wildlife Federation is our state's oldest and largest wildlife conservation organization. We have an 82 year track record of working on tough issues that affect our valued public wildlife, their habitat and public access to enjoy these public trust resources. MWF and our affiliates have for years worked on habitat projects that include our strong system of state Wildlife Management Areas.
		2	The Garrity Mountain WMA is one of those conservation successes, and MWF strongly supports the addition of the 154 acre parcel of private land that adjoins Garrity Mountain just west of Anaconda. This parcel, while relatively small, sits in a key corridor that provides important movement for wildlife. In particular, it is vital for bighorn sheep, but also other big game species including elk and deer. The parcel would provide an important buffer with neighboring lands that are developed and continue to serve as a route for big game to move between the Garrity Mountain WMA and the Blue Eyed Nellie WMA to the south.
		3	This project is exactly what Habitat Montana funds are intended for. In addition, the use of Montana Natural Resource Damage Program and Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust funds are warranted to complete the purchase. The footprint of this parcel illustrates that certain properties that provide linkage can be crucial to maintain wildlife movement. It is a good use of hunter's dollars, and will provide continued and expanded recreational opportunity for sportsmen and sportswomen. We strongly urge the Commission to approve this project.
7	E	1	The Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers highly encourages the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks to acquire the proposed 154- acre addition to the 9,635-acre Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

		2	MTBHA is supportive of the Natural Resource Damage Programs' Restoration Plan (2012) and acquiring this parcel is important as it is a priority landscape for conservation action. The fact that this addition will help secure a migration corridor for the region's big horn sheep makes it extremely valuable, in addition to it securing great wintering habitat for multiple big game species. As Species of Greatest Conservation Need, for FWP to undertake. Securing these habitats also secures in perpetuity wonderful recreation opportunities here to hunt, fish, observe wildlife and hike near to them.
		3	We are highly supportive of collaborative conservation and are thankful to see that this project is part of an ongoing multi-partner initiative including: the Montana Chapter of the North American Wild Sheep Foundation, the Anaconda Sportsmen Club, the George Grant Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program.
		4	The 2,000 MTBHA members advocate to protect large parcels of fish and wildlife habitat as well as the opportunity for traditional non-motorized hunting and fishing experiences. Our organization advocates for healthy, connected habitat, open spaces, and the continuity of Montana's heritage of working lands. The primary benefits of this property are highly aligned with our organization's values and we highly support FWP's acquisition to this 154- acre addition to the Garrity Mountain WMA.
		5	Please inform us of any additional activity on this proposed project and how we might continue to support this and other such efforts.
8	E	1	I would like to express my support for the FWP's acquisition of the additional 154 acres about 7 miles west of Anaconda. This is a great opportunity to protect a migration corridor for Bighorn Sheep, Deer, Elk, Moose, Bear, and a myriad of non game species. The creek also provides excellent habitat for Bull Trout as well as West Slope Cutthroat. I use this area every year. I would appreciate the chance for myself and my family to have access to this area for years to come.
		2	Thanks for your consideration.
9	E	1	In strong support of the acquisition of 154 acres near Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, I write to you today. As a nearby property owner, I view this as healthy stewardship of a significant wildlife migration corridor as well as waterways that include Barker Creek and Warm Springs Creek.
		2	Thank you for your consideration.
10	E	1	In strong support of the MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks acquisition of 154 acres owned by YT Timber near Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area, I write to you today. As nearby property owners, we view this as healthy stewardship of a significant wildlife migration corridor as well as conservation of waterways that include Barker Creek and Warm Springs Creek.
		2	Thank you for your consideration.
11	E		I just wanted to voice my strong support for the acquisition of land from YT Timber to expand this area. This ecosystem is incredibly unique and should be preserved or expanded overtime for the good of the animals and the surrounding community. It is impossible to describe the wonder in the eyes of my children when we see wildlife in that area. I ask that you support the effort on behalf of the people of and from Anaconda.
12	M	1	As a Deer Lodge County resident, sports man and land owner along Barker Creek, I strongly support the addition of the 154-acre land parcel to the GMWMA.
		2	The land is part of a natural corridor between the Blue-Eyed Nellie, Garrity Mountain and Clear Creek. As bighorn struggle, it is critical to assist their viability. It also includes prime bull trout and westslope cutthroat waters.
		3	Access is easy to fish, hunt, bird watch and hike.
		4	For these and many other reasons, I support its inclusion in the GMWMA.
13	E	1	The Montana Wild Sheep Foundation firmly supports this land acquisition into the Garrity WMA. I personally wrote the original grant for this project in 2015 and was awarded \$100,000 from the Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust. The primary driver for protection of this area, is the concern regarding the effects of subdivisions of these last remaining larger parcels in a prime Big Horn Sheep migration corridor. We wrote this grant to ensure public access is protected and the existing habitat is not further fractured making sheep crossing more precarious and dangerous.

		2	These parcels border the Garrity Mountain WMA and U.S. Forest Service; they also have portions of both sides of two streams, Warm Springs Creek (about .5 miles) and Barker Creek (about .2 miles). Both these streams have native Westslope Cutthroat Trout and the endangered Bull Trout populations and are exceptional fisheries. Acquisition of this property would protect these streams from the threat siltation that comes with developing roads and bridges while providing public access for recreational fishing opportunities.
		3	This parcel borders public lands, the state WMA and USFS, they have trout stream that run through them and they are inside the big horn sheep range and elk winter range making them highly desirable to private buyers. Once they are sold they would likely be divided into smaller parcels and thus the opportunity to acquire and protect them would be gone.
		4	If these parcels are acquired public access would be preserved, habitat would not be further fractured and fish and wildlife species would have protected migration corridors to important habitat and critical spawning habitat.
14	PM	1	[Public meeting commenter #1] Supports the proposal
		2	Economic development = hiking, fishing, camping and access.
		3	This WMA will provide habitat that will bring money into this [Deer Lodge] county. People always want to watch the sheep and this property is a corridor. Sheep are an amazing resource, and this will help.
15	PM		[Public meeting commenter #3] Supports the proposal. Important for sheep, mule deer and elk, as I've personally seen. In spring I've seen elk calves in there (on proposed acquisition). Elk cross back and forth.
16	PM	1	[Public meeting commenter #4] I think it's great
		2	Appreciate YT working with FWP.
		3	Watched animals come back over the years. I'm happy to work with FWP to work together on shared issues.
17	PM		[Public meeting commenter # 5] Great bonus for the county and for wildlife and fish in the area. Support it 110%.
18	PM	1	[Public meeting commenter # 6] Supports the proposal. Identified a long time ago as land to be kept intact
		2	Cutthroat and bull trout.
		3	Good access to the north side of GMWMA.
19	E		As I sit here writing to you in regards to the possible addition that is being considered, I am brought back to a swing, a few feet from Barker Creek, hanging from a tree, a small deer nearby as I swing higher and higher till my toes touch the clear blue sky. My most fond memories of learning about wildlife from my Mom and Uncle, information that cherish and I value greatly until this day, and hope that everyone has the same opportunity that I had. This acquisition for FWP would absolutely solidify this opportunity for others to fully enjoy and learn about everything that Public land has to offer and I fully support it.
20	E		I am just writing you to support the addition of 150+ acres to the Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area from YT timber. I spent a large part of my childhood in the woods from Storm Lake, to Mt. Haggin, and all around Barker Creek. I would very much like to see this land public and open to all who seek to enjoy it responsibly and find comfort among nature as I did as a youth; and do whenever I return home.
21	M	1	I am in favor of adding the 154-acre land parcel on Barker Creek to the Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area. It should be in public hands.
		2	If not, I am afraid that greedy landowners will succumb to the temptation to subdivide--thereby limiting access to Barker Creek for people who now own cabins along Barker Creek.
		3	Please preserve wilderness for bighorn sheep, bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout and keep the human traffic to a minimum.